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Notes on distribution and natural history of some poorly known Ecuadorean birds

by Niels Krabbe

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From July 1990 to May 1991, during my first of four years of ornithological field work in Ecuador, work primarily aimed at mapping the distribution of high Andean birds, several observations worth publishing separately from the main report were made. Some of these are described below. Specimens are deposited in Museo Ecuatoriano de Ciencias Naturales (MECN), Quito, Zoological Museum University of Copenhagen (ZMUC), and Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia (ANSP). Tape-recordings are deposited at the British Library of Natural Sounds, London, and Bioakustisk Laboratorium, University of Århus, Denmark.

NOBLE SNIPE *Gallinago nobilis*

Noble Snipe were recorded on Páramo El Angel on two occasions in December 1990 (and one bird collected for identification), and on the páramo south of Volcán Cotopaxi in Janury 1991. The vocalizations heard from the rush beds in Laguna del Limpio on Volcán Cotopaxi on 9 October 1983 at a site where several Noble Snipe had just landed, were in fact partly referable to the song of a Lesser Rail *Rallus limicola aequatorialis*, and partly to what seems to be a call given from the ground by the (female ?) Noble Snipe, and was not, as believed then, a lek song of the Noble Snipe (*contra* Fjeldså & Krabbe 1990: 178). A winnowing resembling that of the Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* was emitted by Noble Snipe during roding in wide circles at dusk and early dawn. M. Hall informs me (verbally 1991) that in moonlight it may rode during most of the night. Synchronous with the winnowing, a loud chipping, much like that given by *G. gallinago* and *G. jamesoni*, was given from the ground, presumably by the female Noble Snipe. The only other vocalization recorded from the Noble Snipe was the rasping call invariably given upon take-off, both day and night.

IMPERIAL SNIPE *Gallinago imperialis*

Two roding birds were tape-recorded and seen on the west slope of Loma Yanayacu on the north slope of Volcán Pichincha at dusk (18.25–19.00) on 17 and 19 December 1990, and (one bird only) again on 10

January and 17 March 1991. The bird perched for 10–60 s between the nuptial flights, and once the perch was seen to be a thick branch of a *Polylepis* tree 3 m above the ground. The distance between the perches used was some 500 m, and the perches roughly formed a 700 m diameter circle. The chachalaca-like song was given continuously during the direct flight between the trees and became slow grunts while the bird was perched. The song was sometimes terminated with a short (5–10 m), almost vertical dive in the middle of the territory, and a simultaneous rush of air could be heard. Roding was noted in clear weather as well as in fog and heavy rain. The elevation was 3600 to 3700 m, the highest recorded for the species, which was hitherto known from 2750 to 3500 m at five localities in Peru and two "Bogotá" specimens of unknown origin. An undocumented sighting (D. Platt 1988: Bird-list for Cajanuma, unpublished) is from Parque Nacional Podocarpus, Loja, southeastern Ecuador, from where there is also a sighting of a roding bird by M. Pearman at dusk and dawn in December 1990 (M. Pearman *in litt.* 1991). The bird's barred back was seen well on the perch, its broad-winged, short-tailed, woodcock-like silhouette in flight, and on the basis of the tape-recordings the identification was further verified by T. A. Parker, who is familiar with the song from Peru. The species' nocturnal habits and inaccessible habitat may explain the paucity of records, and it may in fact inhabit most humid forest/humid páramo ecotones in the tropical Andes.

ANDEAN POTOO *Nyctibius maculosus*

A mating pair of this poorly known species was observed, and the song and calls tape-recorded, on an occasionally moonlit night in wet forest in Cordillera de Huacamayos in southern Napo province, at an elevation of 2100 m, on 2 September 1990. The male used three song posts some 700 m apart, and sang every 8 to 10 s (song described in Schulenberg *et al.* 1984) between showers of rain, for 2–3 minutes at a time, throughout the night. On two occasions a different call (presumably given by the female) lasting 2–3 s and of three short, slightly descending notes was heard, whereupon the female landed on one of the male's empty song posts. Within seconds the male arrived, and a short mating followed. Although distributed in the Andes from Venezuela to Bolivia, there are few records of the species, which remains virtually unknown.

VIRIDIAN METALTAIL *Metallura williami*

One was seen and another netted and a blood sample taken before the bird's release, at 00°39′N, 77°34′W on Páramo El Angel, 3350 m, Carchi province, on 14 November 1990. These represent the first records from the western Andes of Ecuador.

STREAK-CAPPED TREEHUNTER *Thripadectes virgaticeps*

One was collected 9 km west of Piñas, El Oro province, *c.* 900 m, on 14 April 1991. The species was not recorded here by Robbins & Ridgely (1991), who reported the Uniform Treehunter *T. ignobilis* fairly common at this site. Previous records from western Ecuador are from western Carchi province (specimen in MECN) and from Pichincha province (Chapman 1926), the latter being some 400 km to the north of the El Oro site.

WATKINS' ANTPITTA *Grallaria watkinsi*

Although correctly described as a full species (Chapman 1919), *G. watkinsi* was treated as a subspecies of *G. ruficapilla* by Peters (1951). As already discovered in January 1988 by Paul Greenfield (pers. comm. 1990) the song of *G. watkinsi* differs distinctly from that of *G. ruficapilla*, and on 6 February 1991 above Sozoranga at 1750 m, and on 13 April 1991 at Catacocha, both in Loja province, the two species were tape-recorded simultaneously, which proves sympatry. According to B. Best (pers. comm. 1991) both species can also be heard on the lower Pacific slope of Celica mts. At all three sites, however, *G. watkinsi* inhabits deciduous scrub and forest, and *G. ruficapilla* humid forest and scrub. At Catacocha a tongue of acacia-like scrub extended a little way into the humid forest, and the two species sang no more than 10 m apart. No intermediate song-types were heard at either locality. On 27 December 1990 *G. watkinsi* was seen and tape-recorded along Río Ayampe in the coastal range on the border of Manabí and Guayas provinces at an elevation of *c.* 20 m. This represents the first record from the coastal range. There are subsequent records and specimens (ANSP) from the same area at 400–750 m in the transition zone between dry and humid forest on Cerro San Sebastián (T. A. Parker and R. S. Ridgely *in litt.* 1991).

NARIÑO TAPACULO *Scytalopus vicinior*

This species, hitherto only known from 1600 to 1800 m at the type-locality in western Nariño, and from 1950 m on the Pacific slope in Valle, Colombia, was tape-recorded by P. Coopmans near Mindo, at 1700 m, on the northwestern slope of Volcán Pichincha in July 1990. Subsequently the author collected 10 specimens at the same site and an additional two specimens on the Pacific slope of Carchi province at an elevation of 2350 m (and also tape-recorded the species at 1800 m in Cordillera de Toisán in extreme western Imbabura province). Their vocalizations were matched by recordings (by D. Willis and F. Lambert) from the type-locality of *vicinior* (where only one species of *Scytalopus* was noted to be present). These were thought to represent the first recordings of the species' vocalizations. However, the tape-recordings of birds, some of which were collected, on the Pacific slope of Carchi province at 1650 to 1775 m in August 1988 (by M. Robbins) also prove to be of this species. My detailed studies in 1990–91 show that Ecuadorean highland birds treated under Nariño Tapaculo by Fjeldså & Krabbe (1990: 432, sonagrams from Pichincha) are referable to the Brown-rumped Tapaculo *Scytalopus latebricola spillmanni*, while most Ecuadorean birds treated by them under Brown-rumped Tapaculo, *spillmanni* group (p. 435–6, sonagrams from southeastern Ecuador) represent a new species soon to be described.

ANDEAN TAPACULO *Scytalopus magellanicus opacus*

Reliable records of the Andean Tapaculo in Ecuador are from the eastern Andes (Fjeldså & Krabbe 1990). Five males were collected at three localities on Páramo El Angel in western Carchi province at elevations ranging from 3400 to 3950 m, on 16 and 18 November 1990. The species was also heard singing on the Colombian side of the border. These represent the first records of the species in the western Andes.

BUFF-THROATED TODY-TYRANT *Hemitriccus rufigularis*

One was tape-recorded and collected (specimen in MECN, Quito) at 1300 m on a ridge crest 100 m above the Río Hollin road, *c.* 10 km from the turnoff from the Baeza-Tena road, on the southern slope of Cordillera de Guacamayos in southern Napo province on 2 September 1990. After playback of its call the bird was attracted and perched *c.* 8 m up in the lower canopy of tall trees on a ridgecrest in primary humid forest. Another was tape-recorded under very similar conditions at 1300 m on the northern flank of Pan de Azúcar, further north in Napo province, on 2 and 3 November 1990. These records extend the species' range some 300 km northwards, and it may range further north into Colombia. Previous Ecuadorean records are from 1300 m, east of Guadeloupe, on the western base of Cordillera de Cutucú in Morona-Santiago province, where two or more were seen and heard by R. S. Ridgely and R. A. Rowlett, and tape-recorded by the latter on 4 August 1979 (R. S. Ridgely *in litt.*), and from 1400 m, at Pachicutza, western slope of central Cordillera del Condor in Zamora-Chinchipe province, where one specimen (in WFVZ, Los Angeles) was collected by M. Marín on 27 July 1989 (R. S. Ridgely *in litt.*).

ORANGE-CRESTED FLYCATCHER *Myiophobus phoenicomitra*

In western Ecuador this species was hitherto only known south to Pichincha province (R. S. Ridgely *in litt.*). One was collected 9 km west of Piñas, El Oro province, at an elevation of 900 m, on 15 April 1991. The species was not recorded there by Robbins & Ridgely (1991). The record represents a 400 km southward range extension in western Ecuador.

SULPHUR-BELLIED TYRANNULET *Mecocerculus minor*

The species was previously known from scattered localities along the eastern slope of the Andes from Venezuela to central Peru. Two individuals, both first found and identified by J. Sterling, were tape-recorded and observed in outer leaves of young trees in a selectively logged humid forest on a ridgetop at 2500 m on the Pacific slope in Carchi province from 19 to 22 November 1990. One bird was collected (MECN), and does not differ from east Ecuadorean birds in plumage or vocalizations. Its calls include a slightly descending, somewhat nasal *week week week week*, lasting about 1 s and sometimes terminated with a slightly higher-pitched *week* after a short pause, as well as a more commonly heard, rapid *weeka* or *wedup* of a similar quality. This lack of differentiation as well as the previous lack of records from the western Andes suggest the crossing of the Andes to be a holocene event, perhaps even very recent, following the deforestation, as the species prefers young trees.

HIGHLAND ELAENIA *Elaenia obscura*

There are three unpublished specimens of this form in MCZ (nos. 329817-8-9), taken by D. Norton at Loja, 2150 m, Loja province on 27–28 July 1965 (R. S. Ridgely *in litt.*). One (MECN) was taken by the author at the edge of a small forest at 2300 m 1 km east of Cariamanga in southern Loja province on 9 April 1991.

CHIGUANCO THRUSH *Turdus chiguanco*

This species was known north to the vicinity of Riobamba, Chimborazo province (Fjeldså & Krabbe 1991). It was found to be fairly common and one specimen (ANSP) was taken on the slopes of Volcán Iliniza in western Cotopazi at 00°55′S, 78°43′W, 3200 m, on 3 January 1991. There are several recent sight records of a single bird at Tumbaco (*c* 2100 m) near Quito in 1989 and 1990 (P. Greenfield pers. comm.), where the species had not been recorded by the many observers visiting this locality previously, and it most likely represents a recent range extension into the Río Guayllabamba valley, which, according to locals, has been extensively deforested in this century.

BAND-TAILED SEEDEATER *Catamenia analis*

Two single birds were seen on the slope of Río Leones valley below Oña on the El Oro/Azuay border on 14 February 1991. Though its occurrence was suspected (R. S. Ridgely *in litt.*) there are no previously published records of the species from southern Ecuador. They appear to be of the subspecies *soderstromi* (with a conspicuous white wing-speculum and with primaries edged white), which is the form found in northern Ecuador.

ANDEAN SISKIN *Carduelis spinescens*

Although known from Páramo El Angel, Carchi province, since January 1982, when photographed by P. Greenfield (R. S. Ridgely *in litt.*), no specimens had been taken in Ecuador. One (now in MECN) was collected by the author on the same páramo at 00°43′N, 77°47′W, 3400 m, on 16 November 1990. It was the commonest bird there with *c.* 30 individuals observed near our camp.

SAFFRON SISKIN *Carduelis siemiradskii*

Two flocks, of 5 to 6 individuals, were observed and tape-recorded along Río Ayampe in the coastal range on the border of Manabí and Guayas provinces, at 01°40′S, 80°45′W, elevation *c.* 50 m, on 27 December 1990. In 1991 ANSP personnel found it fairly common here, mostly in deciduous woodland at 300–600 m, where one male (ANSP 183551) was taken on 18 January, less commonly up to 800 m in humid mossy forest on nearby Cerro Sebastián; they found the species most in evidence in January, and hardly singing in August (R. S. Ridgely *in litt.*). The species is known from very few localities, the nearest being Balzar mountains, Manabí province at *c.* 00°55′S, 79°55′W, where one was taken by Illingworth, a native collector in the service of C. Buckley, late last century (specimen in British Museum) and "Cemento Nacional", Guayas province, at 02°09′S, 80°02′W (several sightings since first seen here by R. S. Ridgely in July 1978: *in litt.* 1991).

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Requiescat for *Tricholimnas conditicius*, a rail that never was

by Storrs L. Olson

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An unfortunate number of birds were described from a single specimen only, never to be found again. A prevalent trend in ornithology has been to discount and ignore unique types, yet with proper evaluation of their morphology, in combination with careful review of the circumstances of their acquisition, the species founded on them can often be resurrected, adding to our knowledge of previous avian diversity (e.g. Olson 1986a,b, Graves & Olson 1987, James *et al.* 1989, Olson *et al.* 1989).

A discounted species consigned to oblivion for the past 40 years is the presumably flightless rail *Tricholimnas conditicius* Peters & Griscom, 1928. Recently, however, Walters (1987), on the basis of circumstantial historical evidence, concluded that this was a validly described species. To attempt to resolve the issue, I studied both the unique holotype and additional historical evidence, but with opposite result, as I have concluded that *T. conditicius* is not, in fact, a valid species.

Historical review

Much in the original description and subsequent assessment of *T. conditicius* has been marred by errors of judgement, interpretation, or